John 8 (Part 1) :1-11 • Mercy triumphs over judgment

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John chapter 8, and this is actually the last Gospel that we're doing in our third pass through the Bible because I always break up the Gospels with other books. So, John is always at the end, interestingly enough, because it would be weird to do Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John back to back, wouldn't it?

I mean that would probably take a few…well, good grief. Matthew took me 2 and a half years. Can you imagine? And then we go right into Mark and then to Luke, and then you guys would be really sick of it by that time. I'm just kidding you wouldn't be sick of it, but it would be a lot of Gospel accounts back to back, so we always break them up.

Anyway, we're in the eighth chapter and we're going to read through the first 11 verses. So, follow along with me. Actually, I'm going to start reading in the last verse of chapter 7, which says, verse 53, *"They went each to his own house,"* And then verse 1, *"but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. [2]Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and taught them."* See, this is the anointed way to actually do it, sit down. See, this is the…yeah, I just wanted you guys to know that. Yeah. Verse 3, *"The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst, [4]they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery." Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. [7]And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." [8]And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. [9]But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. [10]Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" [11]She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin, no more.""(ESV)*

Stop there, let's pray. Father, as we look into these verses this morning and this just precious story, Lord, we just pray that Your Holy Spirit would minister to hearts. I pray, Father God, for those who have been burdened with the shame

and guilt of sin, that today they would hear from You, from Your Spirit. We always recognize, Lord, when we come together that You are the teacher here in this place and we're just the students, and we want to sit at Your feet today, hear from You, open our hearts to You. Just fill up on truth. How desperately, Lord, we need truth. Do this work, we pray, Father, in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

Well, I have to tell you that the first 11 verses of John chapter 8 are rather odd. There's a couple of odd things about it. First of all, you have to go back to the beginning. As you saw, you have to go back to the last verse of the previous chapter and start reading there because verse 1 begins in the middle of a sentence, which is really kind of odd.

But anyway. But the second thing that really makes this passage strange or odd, I suppose, is the fact that this story doesn't appear in the earliest manuscripts of John's Gospel. You probably see there in your Bible there's a footnote, either a footnote or a note at the beginning, simply saying that the earliest manuscripts of John don't contain these verses 1 through 11. It does appear in later manuscripts. I don't know how much of you understand about Greek manuscripts. I won't get into all of it this morning and bore you with it but this story does appear in some of the later Greek manuscripts. And interestingly enough, it even bounces around in different spots in the book of John through those different manuscripts.

And in one particular manuscript, it actually appears in the book of Luke. So, you can kind of tell that the early Christian scribes believed very strongly that this story was legitimate and truly happened, but they didn't know where it fit exactly. And so, they did their best to keep it.

Here's what's interesting though. We have writings by early Christian authors that go way back really to the time, just after the time, of the apostle. Right around AD 100 we start hearing or seeing some of the Christian authors mentioning this story. We think John, by the way, passed away in AD 99, okay? So, this would've been maybe a year after John went to be with the Lord that the Christian authors were already talking about this story and mentioning it just like they were any other biblical story. And the other thing that makes this story very, very believable, and I believe that this all truly happened, is that the tactic that we see the religious leaders using in this event; to try to catch Jesus, into saying something or doing something that they could use against Him.

This was just very common. This is what they would do to try to get Him to… force Him into one or the other response, which they felt would both be damaging to Him in one way or another. Anyway, so, what do they do? It says

in verse 3 that Scribes and Pharisees brought this woman and they literally dropped her, and Jesus is teaching, he's teaching. So, talk about an interruption. Can you imagine? He's sitting there teaching the people and He's going on and we're not sure exactly what He's saying, wouldn't that have been interesting to know exactly what He was teaching at that time? And then these guys just kind of bust in there, grabbing this woman by the arm and I can imagine them, kind of. throwing her down on the ground, or whatever, and it says they put her in the midst. So, she's right there, front and center, this poor lady, and they explain that this woman was caught in the act of adultery. And then they say in verse 5, now *"the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women."* Which is an interesting statement for them to make because that is not entirely true.

We have two references in the Old Testament in the Law; one in Leviticus and the other one in Deuteronomy where this Law is laid out and God speaks through those passages about those who are caught in the act of adultery or those who have committed adultery. And they both, both passages, explicitly say that the man and the woman should share in the penalty related to that particular sin.

And so, here they are, they show up with this woman who, again, is supposedly "caught in the act." The guy's got to be there if she was caught in the act. And so the first question you're asking, where is he? And so, it's obvious that they're using this woman, they're using her for their own purposes. There's no man that is involved in this situation. We don't even know if they even set her up or whatever, but even so, they're pushing Jesus for a response at the end of verse 5, they say, so *."..what do you say?"* And John clearly tells us, in verse 6, why this whole thing is happening.

It says that they said to test him. So, that's what's going on, this is a test of the emergency broadcast system. No. This is a test, and he says that the reason they're testing is so that they might bring a charge against Him. That's the whole purpose, all right? And they probably thought they had set the perfect trap. "We got him now." They always kind of thought that because, again, they were really good at putting Jesus in a situation where either way He goes is going to look bad. So, if He lets the woman go, well, that's easy. They can essentially charge him with ignoring and dishonoring the Law of Moses. "This man doesn't keep the Law!" But ,if He says, "Okay, let's stone her." And they do, well, then they can go to the Roman authorities and they can charge Him as a law breaker. Because you see, the Romans had taken away the Jewish right to execute someone for a capital crime. It was illegal. That doesn't mean they didn't do it from time to time.

We know they did it with Steven. And we don't know what the fallout was from that. They could have gotten in serious trouble for that, we don't really know. But from time to time their emotions just ran away with them. And they did but it was an illegal thing. And so they're trying to put Jesus between a rock and a hard place by laying this woman before Him and saying and demanding. And it is certainly interesting that at the end of verse 6 we're told that Jesus didn't respond immediately, but He simply bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground.

And Christians have asked me over the years, "What did Jesus write?" And it's like, "Don't even go there. I have no idea. You're going to have to ask him, someday." But we don't know exactly what He was writing. We have no idea, but I have to tell you, I love His response. In verse 7, it says they continued pressing Him and pressing Him. "What are you going to do? What should we do about this situation?"

Finally, He stands up, He says, *"(let him) who is without sin (among you) be the first to throw a stone at her."* What a great response. I mean, I read this and I wish I could come up with stuff like this, don't you? And then, I remember, oh, that's right, I'm not God. So, that's why that doesn't usually happen.

But what is Jesus doing here? What is Jesus saying to them in this response? Well, I want you to notice here that, for starters, Jesus didn't deny that the Law demanded a very serious response to a serious act of sin. He didn't gloss it over. He didn't say, "Oh, come on." No. The fact of the matter is that's what the Law said, and He essentially upheld the legal penalty that was laid down in the Law for adultery by not refusing them. In His comments he did not refuse them to say, "No, you shouldn't do that," or, "No, we're not going to do that today," or "You can't do that." He didn't say any of those things.

But by adding the requirement that only those who had not sinned should cast the first stone, Jesus was in fact exposing what was really going on. And that's, I think, the beauty of this particular passage. I think when most people read this statement by Jesus and they hear Him say what He said they think that what He's saying is, "Let the one among you who has no sin in his life cast the first stone." And that's the most natural conclusion that we come to. But honestly, I don't think that's what Jesus was saying. Because if He was laying that as a standard for the execution of the Law related to capital crimes then none of them would've ever been carried out.

In the Old Testament, we see that Moses and the people of Israel at times carried out the execution of capital crimes, and they were not sinless, right?

There were times when people were stoned to death, but the people who cast the stones were not sinless by any stretch of the imagination.

So, Jesus, I don't think He's necessarily…I don't think He's giving a standard that no one could ever reach. I think, rather, the idea behind Jesus' words is more likely to confront the simple fact that what they are doing in bringing this woman as they were bringing her before Him and so forth, and the purpose for which they brought her, is just as much an act of sin as anything she had done. And so, what I believe that the essence of what Jesus is saying is "Fine, fine. You want to stone the woman? Then stone the woman, go ahead, but let him who sees nothing wrong with this whole picture and nothing wrong with the actions that you have committed today, and if you see this as truly pure and truly free from any wrongdoing, fine, let that person cast the first stone." Because they knew what they were doing was hypocritical and Jesus was calling them out on it.

"You know this is wrong. You know that this is a sham. You know the Word of God says, 'Let the man and the woman be brought forth.' Well, if she was caught in the act of adultery, where's the man? You know what's going on here." And Jesus has such a wonderful way of exposing, does He not? The hypocrisy of their arrangement in using this woman to discredit Him. And the Bible says in verse 9 that, when they heard it, they went away one by one. So, this was not a fast departure on their part, it says beginning with the older ones, they began to go away down to the younger. And then, finally, Jesus was alone with the woman standing before Him.

Now, obviously they're still the people that He's been teaching, they're still there. But as far as those who had come and were holding stones or whatever, or wanting to grab a stone, they began to just walk away one by one. And then we have this beautiful and brief conversation between Jesus and this woman. It's all very quite tender. It says in verse 10 that Jesus stood up and He said to her *"'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' And she said, 'No one Lord.'"* And Jesus uttered some of the most beautiful words that we will ever find within the pages of Scripture; and He says, *"'Neither do I condemn you;'"*

And I love how Jesus found a way to exercise compassion in a situation that surely looked very dark and desperate for this woman at the outset. And I love, most of all, how Jesus communicated to her that she was more important than the sum of all her mistakes. Do you know that today, beloved brother and sister in Christ? Do you know today that you are more precious than the sum of all your mistakes? All of them. He loves you more than all of your mistakes put together. What a statement, what a freeing statement.

But I want you to notice something else about what Jesus said in there, in verse 11. I want you to notice that, while Jesus didn't condemn her, He also didn't ignore her sin, nor did He gloss over it with her in any way. The last thing He said was, *"'go, and from now on sin no more.'"*

Because, you see, Jesus wasn't just interested in freeing her from the clutches of the Pharisees and the religious leaders. He wanted to free her from sin. That's what He came to do. And I love the balance. Jesus, He's so balanced; the balance between compassion and confrontation. It's something…it's, in fact, one more reason that I truly believe that this story is legit, It really truly happened. Because, you see, Jesus always did that; He always had this ability to strike that balance between compassion and confrontation. And that's something that we struggle with doing, right? As humans. We really do, we struggle. We either are all on the compassion side and we gloss over somebody's sin and we actually compromise, or we get the confrontation part down and we completely ignore the whole idea of compassion and we're all just kind of like walking around, leaving a trail of blood everywhere we go. And it's just kind of our way, unfortunately.

But Jesus has such a beautiful way of balancing those two ideas. There are people in the body of Christ who actually have the gift of compassion and it's a lovely thing. I don't know if maybe you have it, you might say, "I don't know if I have the gift of compassion." Well, if you're one of those people that sees somebody in a desperate situation or sees them hurting or whatever, and your heart just breaks, then you probably have the gift of compassion.

And the gift of compassion is lovely. But if we all had the gift of compassion, we would never ever confront sin. We're to speak the truth in love, but we are to speak the truth. And that takes the willingness to kind of stand up and say, "Honey, that was wrong. That was, yeah, bad news."

But so often we land on one or the other of those things and so forth. I actually remember teaching through this passage a number of years ago, back when Sue and I were leading our college age group, we called it 18 to 28. It was a wonderful time. Believe me, none of the people that attended that Bible study are any longer 18 to 28, they've all grown.

In fact, I did more weddings from that particular Bible study than any time here at Life Bible Ministry. We saw a lot of people get married out of that group. But I was going through this passage one time at our college group and a young man in the group started to kind of question the whole scenario of the passage and he asked why the actions of Jesus were acceptable in this particular situation

because, he said, “Well, it was the Law. The Law said that this woman should be punished, and she wasn't punished at all. I mean, except for the shame, I suppose, that they placed upon her. But that wasn't the punishment that was written in the Law.” And he reminded the group, as we're talking about this, that God was very clear in the Scripture that the act of adultery in this way had a bore, a very serious sort of a penalty. And he wondered how Jesus could, in fact, let her off.

He asked the question that I thought a lot of people in the room were probably asking, and that was, “Was not Jesus, in fact, breaking the Law.” And you know what? It was a good question, it really was. And the only answer that makes any sense is that what Jesus did with this woman is what Jesus came to do.

He was doing exactly what He came to do. Do you guys remember back at the beginning of our study of the Book of John, way back in chapter 3? We read this statement. Let me put this on the screen for you, from John 3:17.

John 3:17 (ESV)
For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

That's why He came; not to condemn, but to save. So, what Jesus was doing with this woman caught in the act of adultery was entirely consistent with His mission. “I haven't come to condemn. It's not why I'm here. I'm here to save.” And that's exactly what He did with this woman; He did not condemn, He saved.

Remember when the Apostle Paul said, he said, there's a true statement. *“Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst.”* (1 Timothy 1:15) What did Jesus come into the world to do? To save people, to save sinners. And is that not what we see Him doing in this passage? I love what Peter wrote. Let me show you this, 1 Peter, chapter 2.

1 Peter 2:24a (ESV)
He himself bore our sins (He didn't come to condemn us for our sin. He came to bear our sin. That's what James says, “He himself bore our sins”) *in his body on the tree,* (That's what He came to do.) *that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.*

So, what we see in this is this consistency with what Jesus came to accomplish. And I love this passage from James which, I believe, is the title of what we're sharing here today, James 2.

James 2:13b (ESV)
Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Isn't that beautiful? *"Mercy triumphs over judgment."* Isn't that not what we see happening in this passage? We see mercy triumphing. That's what James wrote about, that's what the apostles believed and lived for, and died for. I guess the thing I love about this story so much is just the clear demonstration that the love and mercy of God is greater than our sin. Did you hear me? The love and mercy of God is greater than our sin. Where sin abounds, what does the Bible say? Grace much more abounds. (Romans 5:20)